

Block Teaching – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

'You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.'

James Clear

What is Block Teaching?

Block teaching is the teaching of the same foundation subject multiple times within the same week or weeks allowing the sequence to be taught over a one- or two-week block. This allows each subject to be taught in depth, ensuring formative assessment in every lesson is strong and can be acted upon with better opportunities for children to produce work of greater quality.

This systematic approach contributes to ensuring curriculum equity across foundation subjects as there is a clear strategic plan that ensures every subject has identified dedicated time on a weekly or blocked basis.

Where resources allow, the whole school teaches the same subject simultaneously to aid monitoring, evaluation and moderation.

What do the children say?

'I really love how block teaching means that we can focus on one subject for longer. I know what I'm learning each week and look forward to the different subjects. The knowledge organisers help me to understand what I need to know and remember, and I enjoy doing the little quizzes too – they're great fun.'

Year 6 child

'Design Technology is my favourite subject to learn because I get to make things and test them out. It's even better now because I don't have to wait ages to finish my design – I have a finished product at the end.'

Year 5 child

'It's easier now to know what I'm doing each afternoon; it was hard to change from one subject to the other and we were always rushing to finish things.'

Year 4 child

'I like learning about history, we get to do it every afternoon and we read books about it in English too.'

Year 2 child.

How are subjects taught in this model?

Implementation Approach	Subject(s)
Taught continuously – daily lessons	English and Maths
Taught continuously weekly 3 times a week	Early Years and KS1 Little Wandle reading groups
Taught continuously twice a week	Physical Education
Taught continuously once a week alternate new content and recall	Music, Computing & MFL (KS2 only) Note – music appreciation & evaluation weekly also via worship time
Taught continuously once a week	Science from September 2023 (subject to review with Science lead)
Taught via block new content every half term	Religious Education and PSHE
Taught via a block new content every term with recall in other half term	History, Geography
*Taught via block alternate terms with recall via connected knowledge and spiral skill building	Art and Design and Design Technology

*Under review with view to doing both each term.

Which subjects are caught continuously? Why is this?

- PE has two dedicated lessons a week so that children have regular and consistent exercise. Teaching PE on an ongoing basis helps children learn the physical and emotional benefits of regular weekly physical activity.
- Music is predominantly a skills-based subject. Musicians should continually develop their skills and abilities. It is therefore beneficial and considered good practice for children to have regular weekly music. Any musical learning benefits continual practice and application in different contexts following a spiral skills-based curriculum. Therefore, Music is taught every other half-term on a weekly basis and a specific listening curriculum has been designed and is taught on a daily basis throughout the year during Collective Worship.
- Research suggests that children make greater progress if they are taught languages on a regular weekly basis. This enables children to practise new learning at home with their families before building on it the following week in school. Therefore, French is taught on a weekly basis with new content introduced every half term and recall and deliberate practice of the new content the following half term. The teaching of MFL (KS2) on an ongoing basis allows regular short bursts of practice of vocabulary including at home.

Why have we chosen a Block Teaching approach to our curriculum at St. Peter's?

There are a number of reasons why we have chosen to implement our curriculum in this way, these are explored below:

- Reducing cognitive overload. By reducing the number of subjects studied over a particular period of time, the cognitive load is reduced thus creating more cognitive capacity for children to process and retain learning.

- Teaching and building core knowledge over days and weeks rather than months helps children acquire a deep, long-term, secure and adaptable understanding of the subject. In order for concepts to be mastered they are taught through small, coherent, manageable steps over a short period.
- Planning & Workload. By blocking planning together for some foundation subjects, we have ensured that the whole teaching team can focus on joint planning ahead of the next block. Expertise can be easily shared, planning workload reduced and equality of provision across each year group for the children. Managing the resources and delivering up to five different curriculum subjects in one day was complex and challenging both cognitively and practically. Often breaks and lunchtimes were spent setting up resources for the next session(s) which had negative impact on workload and well-being.
- Monitoring and Evaluation. Before following a block teaching approach, subject leaders found it challenging to effectively monitor their subjects and see progression across the school. With this approach, dedicated time in staff meetings and subject release time is used to monitor and evaluate subjects.
- Time Efficiency and Consistency. Subject delivery was being hindered by time wasted having to switch between subjects and attempting to fit in all subjects in a week. This resulted in consecutive sessions having to recap on what the children had learned the previous week which slowed the pace of progress for the children and made learning feel disjointed. This was particularly true for more practical subjects like Design Technology. More frequent longer sessions achieve more effective use of curriculum time.

'Lengthier blocks of time given over to art and design can make up for the teaching time given over to 'housekeeping', such as cleaning, organising and maintaining equipment.'

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What does assessment and feedback look like in this approach?

- The impact of the pre-sequence planning staff discussions is that sequencing is better, resulting in any gaps being addressed more quickly.
- Connections between knowledge in the sequence are made quickly within the sequence.
- Misconceptions that arise throughout the unit are identified and addressed appropriately by the teacher. Mistakes are used as learning points. This is achieved within the sequence as opposed to remaining in place between lessons over the course of a number of weeks.

How do children recall knowledge between blocks?

Retrieval practice is a powerful tool that is incorporated into the implementation of the curriculum. It helps our children remember the information and allows them to apply the knowledge to new situations. Consciously recalling knowledge helps learners in long term retention of knowledge, to pull their knowledge "out" and analyse initial learning.

Within our implementation approach, knowledge from the previous block is revisited in the following half term and also at the start of the next curriculum sequence for that subject. There is also an emphasis on the connected knowledge and threshold concepts that link learning within a subject and also between subjects.

Previous learning is continually referred to during lessons to ensure children have strong foundational knowledge to build upon and firm connections are made between concepts. Retrieval practice happens at the start of every new unit of work and retrieval of relevant previous content will also be considered and used carefully.

How are children supported who are not yet secure in their knowledge?

- Ongoing teacher assessment identifies where knowledge has not yet been secured.
- Knowledge organisers for children to take home to continue to work on learning.
- Deliberate practice opportunities designed to secure the knowledge in school and or via home learning.
- Additional recall opportunities in addition to the planned retrieval practice will also be given.

Who Plans Subject Sequences?

The Long-Term Plan is completed by the Curriculum Lead alongside individual Subject Leaders and the Head Teacher. The sequences of precise core knowledge, subject specific skills and vocabulary is planned for each subject by the Subject Leader and agreed by the Curriculum Lead.

The pace of delivery, questions and learning activities are planned by class teachers with the expectation the knowledge will be secured by the end of the sequence. This is monitored, evaluated and refined as needed by Subject Leaders through our staff meeting schedule and planned monitoring activities.